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ABSTRACT

Based upon the view that children learn better if their parents' and teachers' expectations are closely aligned, this study compared expectations of teachers and parents for school readiness skills and preparation required for entry into public school. A Likert rating scale was completed by 25 kindergarten/early childhood teachers and 104 parents of children enrolled in kindergarten/early childhood classes in one Louisiana school community. The survey was modified from one used in a national study on teacher opinion toward selected school readiness skills/preparation attributes. A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to determine if significant differences existed between parents and teachers. Significant questions were examined using independent t-tests to determine the direction of the variation. Local teacher responses were compared to those in the national study. Significant differences were found between parents and teachers on 3 items of the 25-item survey. Parents were more likely than teachers to place importance on time set aside daily to practice school work, to believe that all children would be ready for first grade upon completion of kindergarten, and to place importance on knowing the letters of the alphabet before school entry. Teachers from both the local and the national study identified the same three attributes as essential or very important for children entering public school: (1) physically healthy, rested, and well nourished; (2) can communicate needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in the child's primary language; and (3) is enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities. (The rating scale is appended. Contains 13 references.) (KB)

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ED 437 225

Running Head: TEACHER AND PARENT EXPECTATIONS FOR READINESS

Teacher and Parent Expectations for Kindergarten Readiness

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Abstract

The difference between expectations of teachers and parents regarding school readiness skills and preparation required for entry into the public school setting are presented. This issue of expectations on readiness skills and preparation is presented as it relates to parental and teacher expectations. Since children learn better if the expectations of parents and teachers are closely aligned, the primary purpose of this study is to determine whether significant differences of expectations between parent and teacher groups, which may effect student learning, exist in a school community. Data obtained from administering identical Likert style surveys to teachers (n = 25) and parents (n = 104) in one school community provided evidence that expectations are closely aligned in this school community to facilitate a quality education. A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to determine if significant differences exist between groups. Significant questions on the surveys were examined using Independent T-tests to determine the direction of the variation. Reported significant differences were evaluated and used to select areas for intervention.

The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether significant differences of expectations between parent and teacher groups regarding school readiness skills exist in a school community. This study used survey data to assess whether expectations differ between two groups: parents and teachers, and if so are these differences statistically significant. A second purpose was to investigate differences on individual survey items between these groups in order to select specific areas for intervention to facilitate readiness skills and student success.

"School Readiness" has been at the forefront of our nation's most recent cycle of school reform. This concept is addressed in the Goals 2000 initiative as the first goal. It states that "by the year 2000, all children will start school ready to learn" (Goals 2000: Educate America Act, 1994). While this is clearly a goal which everyone should be able to embrace, how readiness is defined and measured is much less universally established. With many forces including parents, educators, business leaders, and politicians, guiding American education it is difficult to determine who will define readiness and state when an individual is ready to embark on formal education. Depending on who you ask you will get a different answer based upon the source's underlying beliefs and motivations about children, learning, and the role of early childhood education.

Economic and social forces have molded American education into the form currently in place. Now, more than ever before in American education, children attend preschool and kindergarten in preparation for formal education. In 1965 one-in-three children ages 3-5 was enrolled in an early childhood education or kindergarten program. By 1996 attendance had swelled to two-in-three children attending such programs (NCES, 1998). As the enrollment trend has grown, economic and social forces have also shaped academic expectations. Academic subjects and expectations once reserved for 1st grade students have slowly, but steadily, slid

downward to include ever younger students and more children are struggling and failing (NAEYC, 1995). Recent advances in brain research support what cognitive scientists have know for years, very young children do not have the cognitive ability for abstract academic learning (Illig, 1998). However, stimulation, like that available in developmentally appropriate early education programs, does make a significant difference in brain development (Illig, 1998; Kotulak, 1997). Today, decisions about school entry and school readiness have become one of the greatest worries of parents.

Before adopting a position on school readiness, it is necessary to review the fundamental historical progression of early childhood education, the basic theories supporting the practice, and the forces external to education which in recent decades have held great sway with policy makers in forming and reforming American attitudes towards early childhood education. From its inception in 1837 until the 1960's, Kindergarten served as a place first for discovery and later for socialization (de Cos, 1997). Play and learning were, within limits, synonymous. Exposure to music, art, and nature, not reading, writing, and arithmetic was the focus of the day.

The first American Kindergarten (English-speaking) opened in Boston in 1860. It was based upon the model created by Frederich Froebel in Germany in 1837. It was Froebel's belief that education should foster the natural development of children (de Cos, 1997). This philosophy was at the root of various theories offered over the next 100 years. The founders of the child study and progressive education movements, G. Stanley Hall, John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and Arnold Gesell were producing our first looks at child/educational psychology. Their focus was on the child in an educational environment. In 1882, Hall encouraged the National Education Association to make the psychological study of children a key component of the teaching profession (Schultz & Schultz, 1996). Maria Montessori, remarkable for being the first

woman to develop an educational system and for her insight, employed a system focusing on developing children's senses, learning in small sequential steps, and direct observation to determine a child's readiness to progress to the next, more complex, task. Early education, during this period, was based on interaction with the environment. This philosophy remained the standard, but was beginning to receive criticism by the 1940's. Gesell (1940, p.6) felt that "It would, however, be a mistake to propagate the nursery school as a subprimary addition to our present graded school system-as virtually another stratification to be administered like a school room."

Suddenly, there was a shift in philosophy in the 1960's. Prior to this shift, education was based largely on the needs and abilities of the child and how these innate skills could be fostered and expanded. Following the shift, education sought to meet the objectives of commerce and international competition by predicting the skills needed and applying a progression of tasks towards these skills as the curriculum (de Cos, 1997).

Competing educational philosophies have at different times controlled the future of education in America. These perspectives represent national viewpoints and goals for education. The Educationalist dominated the child study movement over the years. They saw the child as a unique individual who would follow a natural path through their education to an end well suited to themselves and, therefore, society. When the American economy is strong, educationalists are generally free to construct curriculum according to their internal philosophies. Utilitarians, on the other hand saw children more collectively, almost as raw material, to be molded into the workforce as required for some future pragmatic need (Boutwell, 1997). Following World War II, America was the only nation in the industrialized world with the capability to flourish economically. Industry prospered and education was left to its own internal philosophies. Then,

in the 1960's, American preeminence was challenged by countries now fully recovered from the war. Foreign countries were more economically competitive and Russia launched "Sputnik" starting the space race with America in second place. Industry sounded the alarm and the pendulum swung. Utilitarian philosophy reigned and the existing education system took a beating for somehow allowing this challenge to American supremacy to emerge (Boutwell, 1997). Decades of reform initiatives followed. These cyclic swings in philosophy and policy took a toll on the educational system.

The most recent alarm to action took place in the 1980s. The 1983 report entitled A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform, begins with these words:

> Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. . . We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur--others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 1).

The report was a scathing admonishment that the elements which make up an educational system; content, standards/expectations, time, and teaching had been allowed to become

homogenized and ineffectual in American schools. While this report never mentioned early childhood education, its focus was on high schools and colleges, it was none the less the impetus for review and debate on the American educational system.

President Bush, in concert with the governors of all states, established goals for American education during a meeting in 1989. The first of these goals was that "by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn." (Lewit & Baker, 1995) Congress enacted the Educate America Act, and President Clinton signed it into law, in 1994 and Goals 2000 entered the education debate.

While this readiness goal was a good ideal, no good definition of school readiness exists. For the goal to become realized and to effectively guide policy and practice, it would have to be more clearly stated and measurable (Lewit & Baker, 1995). School Readiness is a complex issue, including the intertwined factors of health, economics, family construct, community support, customs and values which begins at conception (Illig, 1998). Creating a clear and measurable statement for readiness will be no easy task. Researchers in education and psychology traditionally rely on theory to predict outcomes. School boards and school based educators typically confront the political and social constraints placed upon them to determine how to best educate our young people, without much attention to the theoretical basis for their approach. Parents are at the mercy of a plethora of educated, reliable, trusted resources who seem infinitely distant in their positions on this emerging subject.

There are two predominant beliefs regarding school readiness. The first proposes that responsibility for readiness rests within children and that they will in most cases, given time, become ready for school. This view is traditional in nature and refers to maturational and developmental concepts. In this traditional model, children would be tested and either accepted

or rejected as being school ready based upon a construct of developmental age. A second major belief and alternative perspective is that all children are ready to learn in school based upon internal knowledge and knowledge of the external world. This interactionist/constructivist theory places the readiness burden on both the child and the school, but particularly on the school.

Maturation theory, as proposed by Gesell, suggests that children proceed through a normal, progressive, patterned, and predictable growth process (de Cos, 1997). Gesell (1940, p.7) described this as a "progressive morphogenesis of patterns of behavior." Biological forces determine school readiness, or when a child's developmental age is adequate for educational purposes. Maturationists would support a child's learning by providing curriculum tasks matched to the child's developmental level. Since children of kindergarten age generally lack the cognitive maturity for academic instruction, maturationist would avoid such an approach. Thus, the "Time to grow" is the maturationist prescription for a child not ready for academic instruction.

Interactionist/Constructivist, like Piaget and Vygotski, suggest that children possess innate knowledge which fosters curiosity and a drive for problem solving. Through interaction with their environment, children develop, test, and accept or reject hypotheses, continuously revising their knowledge. These theorists would reject testing as a method of determining readiness. For them, a readiness threshold is not an issue since all children are ready to learn. Schools bear the readiness burden of being prepared to work with all children, at their current level of skills, as they arrive at the door. (de Cos, 1997; NAEYC, 1995)

The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the American Academy of Pediatrics both reject readiness testing, stating that it fails to adequately account for variation between individuals (Lewit & Baker, 1995; NAEYC, 1995). Rather, a set of

expectations closely aligned with the interactionist/constructivist perspective is proposed. In their position paper, NAYEC (1995, p. 2) states "Schools may reasonably expect that children entering kindergarten will be active, curious, and eager to learn. They will know some things about themselves, and will be interested in making friends and sharing experiences with them." While this belief is growing and is now widely accepted among early childhood researchers, it may be less well known and accepted amongst teachers and parents. These groups may tend to hold more traditional ideals.

Along with the obvious impact of the type of beliefs parents and teachers hold towards early childhood education, the congruence of beliefs between these two groups is important. Parents who know what is appropriate and expected in school are more likely to provide experiences for their child which will develop those skills. Teachers may see these children in a more positive light improving the child's outlook for positive evaluations and reports. Goodlad's study (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1995, p. 37) found that "the greatest single predictor of school success was goal congruence among teachers, administrators, students, and parents."

This survey, a subset of the Kindergarten Teacher Survey on Student Readiness modified with permission of the U.S. Department of Education, was specifically adapted to assess the congruence in beliefs between parents and teachers regarding readiness skills. Theoretically, by using data obtained from this survey, specific differences between expectations for both groups will be identified and selected for intervention strategies.

Methodology

Participants

The research sample included kindergarten/early childhood education teachers (n = 25) and parents of students enrolled in these kindergarten/early childhood classes (n = 104) from a

randomly selected local public school system. All teachers at the school elected to participate in the study. All parents (n = 195) received a survey package and 53 percent elected to participate, returning a completed survey. This survey complied with all applicable ethical guidelines, the Louisiana State University in Shreveport and Caddo Parish School Board regulations.

Design

This descriptive research project used a survey to gather information regarding school readiness from two populations: teachers, and parents. Identical Likert style surveys were administered to the two groups in order to examine the similarities and differences in attitudes toward readiness skills/preparation. Each of the selected readiness elements was addressed in the survey.

Instruments

The survey (see Appendix A), a Likert-type instrument was constructed from elements of a larger study on the respective opinions of teachers towards selected school readiness skills/preparation attributes in children. The original survey, conducted for the U.S. Department of Education: Office of Educational Research and Improvement in 1993, was reported in National Center for Education Statistics Report NCES 93-410. This survey, while it applied only to teachers, provided a source of tested questions and a basis for comparison of local teacher responses to a larger sample. The core questions of the parent and teacher surveys used in this study are identical, only the demographic data is different (see Appendices B and C).

Procedure

Selected school personnel were briefed on the purpose of the study following approval from the Caddo Parish School Board. Materials were distributed to all kindergarten and early childhood education teachers at the selected school. Material packages included the following

items: (a) a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study; (b) a teacher survey with a return envelope; (c) a parent survey with a return envelope for each child in the class. Teachers were asked to complete the teacher survey, place it in a return envelope, and place the envelope in the collection pouch provided for their class. Teachers were also responsible for sending one parent survey home with each child in their class and collecting these surveys when they were returned. The teacher was under no obligation to pursue the collection of these surveys. Parents were asked to complete the survey, seal it in the envelope provided, and return it to the teacher via their child. All returned parent surveys were collected and placed in the pouch in a designated office location for retrieval.

Since neither form of the survey requested specific, individually identifiable, personal information the participant's rights to confidentiality were not at risk. The only identifiable information was contained on the request for a completed study form included with each survey. This form was removed from the package by a colleague before the researcher received the packages. Every ethical consideration and precaution was taken to ensure participant confidence that their responses will not be compromised and the results will in no way reflect upon them in a singular fashion.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data involved a comparison of the responses to the questionnaire from respective populations using a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA). If this analysis disclosed a statistically significant difference between the opinions of the two populations, a series of Independent T-tests on each question in the survey would be used to identify the specific differences between the groups. Finally, a comparison of local teacher responses to those

recorded in the national study will help understand if there are differences between teachers in the selected local school and a sample of their peers across the nation.

Results

Multivariate Analysis of Variance revealed significant differences between parent and teacher responses for three of the twenty five questions on the survey. These three questions were examined further, using Independent T-tests, to determine the direction of the observed differences. As to whether it is important for parents to set aside time daily to practice schoolwork, parents ($M = 4.70$, $SD = .573$) were more likely to place importance on time to practice school work daily at this age than were teachers ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.354$). This difference was significant $t(26.10) = -2.54$, $p < .05$, two-tailed. Parents ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.104$), were more likely to believe that by the end of kindergarten all children would be ready for first grade, than teachers ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.145$). This difference was significant $t(35.52) = -1.96$, $p < .05$, two-tailed. Whether it is important for a child to know the letters of the alphabet before entering school was the final difference detected. Parents ($M = 4.34$, $SD = .820$) saw this skill as more essential than teachers ($M = 3.92$, $SD = .862$). This was significant $t(35.18) = -2.19$, $p < .05$, two-tailed.

Comparison of the teacher results only, with the responses of teachers in the national study, disclosed that both groups identified the same top three attributes, although not in the same order, in children as essential or very important for children entering public school. These attributes are: (a) Is physically healthy, rested, and well nourished; (b) Can communicate needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in the child's primary language; and (c) Is enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities. Nationally, teachers ranked these attributes in the order shown above. Locally, teachers ranked communication of needs, wants and thoughts first; and being

physically healthy, rested, and well nourished second. The third attribute was ranked evenly in both samples. However, due to the relatively small size of the local sample several other attributes clustered with enthusiasm and curiosity in the third position. These attributes included knowing the English language, sitting still and paying attention, following directions, and knowing the primary colors and basic shapes.

Discussion

Analyses of these results show that this school has done a remarkable job of educating parents on the school philosophy. Only three of twenty-five questions showed a significant difference between parents and teachers opinions. Such high levels of congruence between parent and teacher groups may be facilitating factors in the quality of education students in this school receive. Although the differences between parent and teacher expectations are small, action should be pursued to eliminate any significant differences. With these differences exposed, school administrators may now consider how and with whom to plan and deliver interventions to close the gap between the groups studied. Reviewing current curricular plans and best practices will permit this school community to become even closer together to better serve the needs of their youngest students.

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Darken the circle matching your answer to each question.

1. How many children 7 years of age or younger live in your house?

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦

2. Please show the age that each child entered a pre-school, early childhood education, headstart, or kindergarten program.

	Years-of-Age
Child 1	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦
Child 2	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦
Child 3	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦
Child 4	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦
Child 5	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦
Child 6	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦
Child 7	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦

3. **What is the main language spoken in your household?** _____.

4. **Please show <u>your</u> highest level of education.**

① Less than High School

② High School Diploma or GED

③ Some College

④ Associates Degree in _____

⑤ Bachelors Degree in _____

⑥ Graduate Degree in _____

Here are some statements about what makes children ready for school. Show how much you agree with each of the statements by darkening the circle matching your answer using this scale:

❶ = *Strongly disagree;* ❷ = *Disagree;* ❸ = *Neutral;* ❹ = *Agree;* ❺ = *Strongly agree*

1. Attending preschool is very important for success in kindergarten.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2. Children who began formal reading and math instruction in preschool will do better in elementary school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3. Parents should make sure that their children know the alphabet before they start kindergarten.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4. If a child appears to be unready for kindergarten, I would suggest he or she wait a year before enrolling.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5. Children with a readiness problem should enter school as soon as they are eligible so they can be exposed to the things they need.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6. Readiness, comes as children mature; you can't push it.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7. I can enhance children's readiness by providing experiences they need to build important skills.	①	②	③	④	⑤
8. Parents should set aside time every day for their kindergarten children to practice schoolwork.	①	②	③	④	⑤
9. Homework should be given in kindergarten almost every day.	①	②	③	④	⑤
10. I assume that by the end of the kindergarten year all children will be ready for first grade.	①	②	③	④	⑤

Please complete Part 2 on the back of this sheet now.

How important do you think these qualities are for a child to be ready for kindergarten? Show how important they are by darkening the circle matching your answer using this scale:

❶ = *not at all;* ❷ = *not very;* ❸ = *somewhat;* ❹ = *very;* ❺ = *essential*

1. Is physically healthy, rested, well nourished.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2. Finishes tasks.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3. Can count to 20 or more.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4. Takes-turns and shares.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5. Has good problem solving skills.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6. Is enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7. Is able to use pencils or paint brushes.	①	②	③	④	⑤
8. Is not disruptive of the class.	①	②	③	④	⑤
9. Knows the English language.	①	②	③	④	⑤
10. Is sensitive to other children's feelings.	①	②	③	④	⑤
11. Sits still and pays attention.	①	②	③	④	⑤
12. Knows the letters of the alphabet.	①	②	③	④	⑤
13. Can follow directions.	①	②	③	④	⑤
14. Identifies primary colors and basic shapes.	①	②	③	④	⑤
15. Communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in the child's primary language.	①	②	③	④	⑤

Darken the circle matching your answer to each question.

1. Do you teach: ① Full-Day ② Half-Day

2. What type of class is this?

① Pre-kindergarten
② Kindergarten
③Transitional (or readiness) kindergarten class
④Transitional first grade class
⑤ Multigrade or ungraded class with at least some kindergarten age children

1. *Pre-kindergarten – program primarily for 4 year olds prior to kindergarten.*
2. *Kindergarten – traditional year of school primarily for 5 year olds prior to 1st grade.*
3. *Transitional (or readiness) – extra year of school for kindergarten-age eligible children who are judged not ready for kindergarten.*
4. *Transitional First Grade – extra year of school for children who have attended kindergarten and have been judged not ready for first grade.*

3. How many years have you been teaching?

① Less than 5 ② 5-10 ③ 11 or more

4. How many years have you been teaching children under 7-years-old?

① Less than 5 ② 5-10 ③ 11 or more

5. Did you major in early childhood education in college or graduate school?

① Yes ② No

6. Are you currently a member of a professional early childhood education association?

① Yes ② No

7. How many early childhood education classes have you completed?

① Less than 5 ② 5 to 9 ③ 10 or more

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Here are some statements about what makes children ready for school. Show how much you agree with each of the statements by darkening the circle matching your answer using this scale:

❶ = *Strongly disagree;* ❷ = *Disagree;* ❸ = *Neutral;* ❹ = *Agree;* ❺ = *Strongly agree*

1. Attending preschool is very important for success in kindergarten.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2. Children who began formal reading and math instruction in preschool will do better in elementary school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3. Parents should make sure that their children know the alphabet before they start kindergarten.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4. If a child appears to be unready for kindergarten, I would suggest he or she wait a year before enrolling.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5. Children with a readiness problem should enter school as soon as they are eligible so they can be exposed to the things they need.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6. Readiness, comes as children mature; you can't push it.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7. I can enhance children's readiness by providing experiences they need to build important skills.	①	②	③	④	⑤
8. Parents should set aside time every day for their kindergarten children to practice schoolwork.	①	②	③	④	⑤
9. Homework should be given in kindergarten almost every day.	①	②	③	④	⑤
10. I assume that by the end of the kindergarten year all children will be ready for first grade.	①	②	③	④	⑤

Please complete Part 2 on the back of this sheet now.

How important do you think these qualities are for a child to be ready for kindergarten? Show how important they are by darkening the circle matching your answer using this scale:

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1. Is physically healthy, rested, well nourished.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2. Finishes tasks.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3. Can count to 20 or more.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4. Takes-turns and shares.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5. Has good problem solving skills.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6. Is enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7. Is able to use pencils or paint brushes.	①	②	③	④	⑤
8. Is not disruptive of the class.	①	②	③	④	⑤
9. Knows the English language.	①	②	③	④	⑤
10. Is sensitive to other children's feelings.	①	②	③	④	⑤
11. Sits still and pays attention.	①	②	③	④	⑤
12. Knows the letters of the alphabet.	①	②	③	④	⑤
13. Can follow directions.	①	②	③	④	⑤
14. Identifies primary colors and basic shapes.	①	②	③	④	⑤
15. Communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in the child's primary language.	①	②	③	④	⑤